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# ***Iowa Outdoors***

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**www.iowadnr.com**

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## **NATURAL LAKES SURVEY REVEALS GOOD SURVIVAL FOR 2006 WALLEYE STOCKINGS**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE---DNR fisheries personnel have completed their annual young of the year fish surveys. Conducted each year during late summer and early fall, the netting census is designed to gauge the production, survival, and growth of more than a dozen fish species occurring in Iowa's natural lakes.

"The number of young walleyes surveyed at Clear Lake this year is just about average," said DNR fisheries technician, Scott Grummer. "Growth was excellent and most fish measured six inches which is about as large as they get by early September. The body condition of those young walleyes was excellent."

Grummer noted that the 2006 production for yellow bass and spot-tail shiners was also about average. The annual success or failure of these species largely determines the

amount of forage available to larger predator fish, such as walleye.

"This year's yellow bass production looks pretty solid," said Grummer. "Clear Lake has enjoyed pretty consistent year classes and consistent growth [of yellow bass] during the past six to eight years, and it looks as if that trend should continue," said Grummer.

"One notable exception was during the spring of 2005 when spawning conditions were extremely favorable at Clear Lake and production for almost all species was nearly double the long term average," said Grummer. "The amount of forage -- especially yellow bass -- was excessive. Walleye fishing became extremely tough as a result. This year, there are enough young of the year fish to provide predators with an adequate food base but not enough to have a negative impact on angling success. The fall and winter fishing for walleye should definitely be better than it was last year. There is currently a very good population of 14-inch to 18-inch, legal length walleyes in Clear Lake and those fish should be showing up in the harvest this winter."

#### **SPIRIT LAKE/ OKOBOJI**

"Here at Spirit Lake we surveyed a large number of spot-tail shiners which are a very important forage species," said northwest Iowa fisheries biologist, Jim Christianson. "Our yellow perch hatch was average or slightly below which was not as good as I had hoped for. Average perch numbers were a little surprising since we had high water this spring which usually favors the perch spawn."

Christianson noted that the number of young of the year largemouth bass and smallmouth bass was good in Spirit Lake, and that the numbers of five-inch young walleye were about average. High numbers of young of the year bluegills were recorded on Okoboji.

"It was a pretty good production year and we also have good populations of adult fish in the Great Lakes. I think things are looking pretty good overall, and we're anticipating this winter's ice fishing to reflect that," said Christianson.

#### **STORM LAKE/ BLACK HAWK LAKE/ NORTH TWIN**

The numbers of young of the year walleye collected at Storm Lake this month were nearly twice the five year average according to DNR Fisheries Technician, Don Herrig.

"This year's fry stocking did very well," said Herrig. "Young walleyes are measuring around 5 1/2-inches and look very good."

"Catfish numbers [at Storm Lake] were down from what we've seen during the past four years. The fish we did survey were bigger than average which is what you'd expect with a smaller year class and less competition," Herrig noted.

"Gizzard shad were way up this year, and will provide a great forage base for

Storm Lake predator fish," added Herrig. "The majority of the shad we netted measured around 3 1/2-inches which is perfect for walleyes."

The number of young channel catfish surveyed at *Black Hawk Lake* increased 100 percent over last year, while the number of bluegills decreased slightly. The numbers of gizzard shad were slightly above average, said Herrig.

Walleye numbers remained average while largemouth bass production enjoyed its second consecutive year of increase.

At *North Twin*, the production of yellow bass was "way up", while the number of young bluegills, shiners, and other minnows continued to decrease. The lake's walleye numbers remain average.

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## **STATE FOREST NURSERY – LOOKING FOR GOOD NUTS**

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) forestry bureau is looking for people in central Iowa whose lawn and sidewalk will become covered with acorns over the next couple of weeks.

"Don't throw them away," said John Walkowiak, chief of the DNR's forestry bureau. "Those acorns are important. The State Forest Nursery can use those acorns again this year to grow new oak trees for the future."

The DNR began accepting donated acorns in the Des Moines metro area September 1 at the State Capitol complex. The new drop-off site is in a large parking lot just south of the Hoover State Office Building.

"We are asking residents to bag their acorns in paper sacks or open cardboard boxes and drop them off at the new drop off site in the northwest corner of the parking lot just south of the Hoover State Office Building at the intersection of E Court Ave and E 13<sup>th</sup> Street," Walkowiak said. Acorns should not be placed in plastic bags as the plastic captures the acorn's heat, which damages the seed. Acorns that have been run through the lawn mower are usually damaged and have little value to germinate.

According to Walkowiak, white oak acorns must be picked up almost as soon as they hit the ground since they germinate in the fall, whereas red, bur and other oak acorns germinate in the spring but need to be planted in the fall to break the hard seed coating.

If possible, different types of acorns should be kept in separate bags or containers to allow ease in sowing the seed. "It is fairly easy to identify the various types of acorns. Bur oak acorns possess a hairy, fuzzy-like cap that covers most of the acorn, where white

oak acorns are long, light brown to purple in color and have a small cap. Red oak acorns are fat, dark brown in color and also have a small cap,” said Walkowiak. “But if you are unsure of the type of acorn, that’s okay. Any acorn donation will help in our effort to reforest oak trees across Iowa.”

The acorn is the fruit of Iowa’s state tree, the oak, and has multiple values for mast or food for Iowa’s native wildlife such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey and even blue jays. “With the increased interest in tree planting in Iowa to aid water quality protection, we need acorn seed to grow new oak trees that can take up to two years to reach six to 12 inches in height,” he added.

For landowners wanting to plant to several hundred native oak trees, the State Forest Nursery operation has good numbers of seedlings for next spring ready to be ordered. To place an order for new oak tree seedlings or any of the 40-plus native tree and shrub conservation seedlings, contact the State Forest Nursery directly at 1-800-865-2477 or go online to place your order at [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/).

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966, or by email at [john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us)**

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[electronic photos available DSC\_0873.JPG, 07400022.JPG, 02380210.JPG]

## **UNDERRATED AND UNAPPRECIATED, TURKEY VULTURES PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICE BY BEAUTIFYING THE IOWA LANDSCAPE --- ONE ROADKILL AT A TIME**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

*"It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it."*

CLEAR LAKE - We've all heard that line a thousand times. But for me, those well worn words recently gained new meaning when I stopped to observe members of a highway cleanup crew doing their job.

The highway crew was actually a family of turkey vultures. The birds, two adults and a youngster, were eagerly focused on the cleanup of a roadkilled 'possum. Well tenderized by the tires of commuting motorists, the carcass had been reduced to a flat and greasy, fly attracting mess. I could go on, but since I know that many of you read these columns during breakfast, I'll spare the details.

For humans, the scene was disgusting to be sure. But for traveling vultures, the opportunity represented nothing less than a four star banquet.

After slowing my vehicle and pulling aside to watch, it quickly became apparent that the show was not designed for anyone with a weak stomach.

Standing atop the unfortunate 'possum's remains, papa vulture greedily slurped a savory blend of guts, fur, blood, and bone. Whenever more traffic approached, the huge birds would reluctantly launch into the air. Once the coast was clear, the circling scavengers would land again and another bird would take its turn at the table. The scenario was repeated over and over again. The efficiency was remarkable. In less than ten minutes, all that remained of said 'possum was a distinct grease spot on the warming pavement. Mission accomplished, the vultures flapped away and were soon lost to view.

If you spend much time out of doors, you already know that the turkey vulture has become an increasingly common feature of the Iowa landscape. With the species' six foot wingspan, carnivorous habits, and soaring flight, most people assume that vultures are a member of the raptor family. Amazingly, they are more closely related to storks and flamingos than to hawks and eagles.

Unlike real raptors who catch their food on the fly, vultures subsist on carrion. Consequently, they routinely deal with some extremely nasty food items. While the practice may seem repulsive, it actually sanitizes the countryside and aids in suppressing the spread of disease --- particularly to livestock.

In addition to consuming carrion, vultures also ingest wholesale quantities of potentially dangerous bacteria. To survive the ordeal, the scavengers employ a unique 108-degree digestive system that effectively destroys [cooks?] any living organisms that may happen to slide down their gullet --- including cholera and E.coli.

Although vultures have keen eyesight and may locate food while soaring at great heights, they also have a very advanced sense of smell. Unlike other birds, they have the ability to track down sun ripening meals simply by following their noses. Natural gas companies have utilized the vulture's acute olfactory sense to detect suspected leaks in underground lines. After adding a "carrion-like scent" to their odorless product, gas workers simply sat back and watched the skies as gathering vultures pointed the way to defective lines.

Several years ago, I had an interesting encounter with an adult vulture while hunting spring turkeys near western Iowa's loess hills.

After hours of scaling some particularly rugged terrain, I finally gave in to what had become an unseasonably warm afternoon. Stretching out on a soft carpet of grass and leaves, I was fast asleep in no time. Sometime later I was awakened by a loud flapping sound. Cautiously opening my eyes, I was greeted to the intense stare of a vulture that had landed less than a dozen feet distant. To me, it was obvious that the feathery scavenger had been sizing me up as a potential meal. Upon discovering that I was still alive, the huge bird quickly left the scene.

I still think about that big vulture from time to time. I've always hoped that the bird found me by using his eyes.

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## **BIG WALL LAKE DUCK HUNTERS SHOULD FIND ALTERNATIVE MARSH FOR 2006 WATERFOWL SEASON**

DOWS - Big Wall Lake may look like it is ready for the upcoming waterfowl season, but do not be fooled by its appearance. Big Wall Lake, near Dows in north central Iowa, is in the process of a major renovation project to eliminate a carp population and return to being one of the premier waterfowl marshes in the state.

“Today, it looks deceptively inviting,” says Doug Janke, wildlife biologist for the Big Wall Lake area. “But, Big Wall’s renovation has left the lake dewatered. Aside from three very small pockets of 12-inch water, the shallow lake has two to three inches of water over mud-flats.”

Thanks to a cooperative effort between the Wright County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Prairie Winds RC&D, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Big Wall Lake is being restored. The cooperation of adjacent landowners and sportsmen was critical, too.

Water levels above historic crest elevations plus an introduction of carp into this lake led to an environmental decline over the past 25 years. What was once a pristine 900-acre marsh with diverse plant and animal life has degraded to a mud-hole with a narrow band of cattails along the shoreline.

“My kids loved to explore the marsh with me in the early 1980s. The water was so clear you could see a dime on the bottom through four foot of water. Now you can’t see down six inches,” said Janke.

The restoration work requires installing a new outlet structure for Big Wall Lake to allow the lake to be drained and carp eliminated so natural vegetation can be reestablished. By removing the carp, the bottom feeding fish will no longer uproot the aquatic vegetation; and, the water will clear. Outlet construction, carp removal, and revegetation will be completed by early June 2007.

This will allow the DNR to begin refilling the lake, hopefully in time to provide some water for the 2007 waterfowl season. Meanwhile, this is a great place to see shallow water birds like sandpipers and plovers.

“The lake has two foot of muck under the shallow water. Getting out in boats or waders is nearly impossible this fall, says Janke. “ I would strongly suggest you hunt ducks elsewhere this fall.”

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## **YOUTH HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES HELP TO PASS ALONG THE TRADITION**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It's great to be a kid. Never more so than during Iowa's hunting seasons. Besides hunting in the regular season, young hunters in Iowa also get the chance to pursue most major species before their dad, mom or other adults can.

A lot of us can think back to a numbing December wind along a fence line or maybe sitting through a November sleet storm in the marsh, waiting for deer or ducks that didn't appear. Or perhaps you remember getting shuffled around; being told to sit here, or walk there as the adults in the party tried to get in their share of hunting, too before the big buck trotted past or before a flock of close working ducks dropped into the decoys. Not exactly fond memories.

That's why special youth dates have been built into Iowa's hunting seasons. Young hunters, or 'would be hunters' can spend some quality time in the field, with the emphasis on *them*. “A normal hunting season gets busy for hunters,” notes Department of Natural Resources training officer A. Jay Winter. “Youth seasons offer a positive experience; a more relaxed setting...and usually in warmer weather.”

Winter gets a double dose of youth hunting each year; with his young sons learning the basics...and through special youth deer hunts he coordinates at Springbrook State Park, near Guthrie Center. With successful 'in park' hunts at Springbrook in 2004 and 2005, the area has *two* slated for this fall. Another is scheduled at the 4H Camp, near Boone.

At the Springbrook hunts, a couple dozen novices show up on Friday...and leave Sunday with enough experience that they and their mentors can confidently head out on their own deer hunt. “It's just pure elation,” says Winter, recalling the feeling of those youngsters, as they leave...usually with the antlerless deer they harvested themselves and field dressed. “It gives them a positive introduction to deer hunting. They have a 'hands on' application of what they just learned in the classroom and outdoor settings.”

Occasionally, the mentor knows as little about deer hunting as the youth. That's why sessions cover hunting laws, equipment and safety, as well as an overview of deer biology and management of the deer herd. They'll walk safety trails and identify likely

deer areas and hunting points. They learn how to field dress deer...and even process it. There is a fee for the weekend; which includes meals and dorm lodging. Often, a local Pheasants Forever chapter or other sponsor picks up the costs for a local kid and mentor.

This year, in addition to the 12 through 15 age range for the November hunt, Springbrook is offering the December weekend for those 12 and up. That would allow older participants; perhaps a spouse or in-law, to get an up close look the world of deer hunting. The emphasis in Springbrook camp is that only 'inexperienced hunters' need apply.

But most youth hunters will be in a one-on-one setting with an adult; some one who has hunted for quite awhile and who wants to pass along what they know. They are not hunting themselves, so each can focus on the young hunter. That adult needs the proper licensing 'paperwork.' Iowa's hunting regulations (online at [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com) or in booklets available at licensing outlets) specify season to season requirements. For instance, a waterfowl 'mentor' needs a license, habitat fee and the state waterfowl 'stamp,' if normally required. That mentor must also have a harvest information, or HIP, number. The mentor cannot carry a firearm or bow in the hunt, pursuing the same animal, for instance. That keeps the attention on the hunter who is doing the learning.

Besides learning a skill they can carry through for life, those young hunters come away with a lot more. "It's passing on a tradition; sharing a special experience," offers Winter. "It's an evening in the marsh as the ducks return. It's the snow falling in the woods. It's certain values (they can learn)."

It's great being a kid.

### **Youth Hunting Seasons**

Deer September 16-October 1

Waterfowl October 7-8

Pheasant October 21-22

Turkey April 13-15 (2007)

### **Special Youth Deer Hunts**

Springbrook November 17-19 (ages 12 through 15)

December 15-17 (ages 12 and up)

Contact: AJ Winter, 641-747-8383 or [a.winter@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:a.winter@dnr.state.ia.us)

4H Camp November 17-19

Contact: Jim Pease, 515-294-7429 or [jlpease@iastate.edu](mailto:jlpease@iastate.edu)

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## FALL VOLUNTEER TREE DISTRIBUTION EVENTS BEGIN, ALONG WITH OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

DES MOINES – The fall breeze marks the start of new volunteer opportunities throughout the state. Iowans have a variety of outdoor opportunities for natural resources volunteerism. Keepers of the Land, the volunteer program within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), encourages all Iowans to join these efforts:

- **Tree Distributions:** The first fall Operation ReLeaf and Plant Some Shade community events have begun and are scheduled for consecutive Saturdays through October 21. Volunteers are needed to help distribute low cost trees to utility customers. Look for distribution events in Poweshiek County on September 23 and in Polk County on September 30. Visit the Keepers of the Land website (see below) for an online calendar listing of events.
- **River Cleanup:** Join other water enthusiasts along the Missouri River. Volunteers will be removing trash from the Lewis and Clark Landing in Riverfront Park in Council Bluffs on Saturday, September 23. Contact Missouri River Relief at (816) 812-5166 or visit [www.riverrelief.org](http://www.riverrelief.org) for details.
- **Prairie Management:** Help restore Iowa's native prairies. Volunteers are needed to help remove woody invasive species from the prairie at Dolliver Memorial State Park. Contact Kevin Henning at [kevin.henning@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:kevin.henning@dnr.state.ia.us) or (515) 359-2539 for details.
- **Baffle Dismantling:** A group of 5-10 volunteers are needed for assistance in dismantling four baffles, wooden and metal structures filled with gravel, at the Charles Butch Olofson Range in Polk City. Volunteers with experience in construction work and operation of hand tools and equipment would be a plus. Some heavy lifting will be required. Contact Michael Warman [olofsonrange@mchsi.com](mailto:olofsonrange@mchsi.com) or (515) 238-6977 for details.

Find more information, including an online events calendar, go to [www.keepersoftheland.org](http://www.keepersoftheland.org).

**For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at [Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us).**

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[electronic photos available 02360327.JPG, 02360285.JPG]

**WEEKEND HAWK WATCH TO CELEBRATE ANNUAL  
MIGRATION**

By Lowell Washburn  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

**MC GREGOR**---It's as predictable as the change of season. From mid-September through the end of October, tens of thousands of migrating raptors will converge in the skies over northeast Iowa and then flood southward through the steep, wooded corridors of the Mississippi River.

Even more precise in its timing is the assemblage of humans [Hawk Heads] who gather in the same place each autumn to observe and celebrate this annual and dramatic passage of winged hunters. For one glorious weekend, Iowa's Effigy Mounds National Monument will become *RAPTOR CENTRAL*: a place where bird of prey enthusiasts come from far and wide to observe, learn, and appreciate.

Officially known as Hawk Watch Weekend, it is Iowa's premier wildlife viewing event. Headquartered three miles north of Marquette at the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center, the annual celebration occurs, rain or shine, during the last full weekend of September.

"Two things that people can definitely count on finding here are bird observations and education," says Hawk Watch coordinator, Pam Kester. "Anyone who comes here can plan on learning how to identify migrating hawks, and they'll get an especially good feel for the accipters [short winged, long-tailed, woodland hawks]. People will also learn how to tell if the hawk they're watching is a red-tail or a broad-wing; if it's an adult or immature.

"There are lots of opportunities and we always have at least a few very good or unusual sightings," noted Kester. "Sometimes it's a huge kettle of broad-winged hawks or maybe an osprey that carries a fish right over the crowd. There are good opportunities for observing bald eagles here and we usually see migrating peregrine falcons. You just never know what's coming next."

Iowa DNR wildlife diversity technician and osprey restoration coordinator, Pat Schlarbaum has assisted with Hawk Watch every year since 1984.

"One of the things that makes this event so exciting is that people don't just come here to be entertained. They come to engage; they come to learn," said Schlarbaum.

"We see people at all levels of knowledge. Here, it doesn't really matter if a person is already an expert or if they're just learning to look through the right end of a spotting scope. There are opportunities for everyone to learn something new and to have fun while doing it," added Schlarbaum.

"When you combine the educational opportunities with the chance to observe this World Class migration firsthand, it just naturally takes people to a new level of environmental awareness. You can just see the wonder in the kids' eyes as they absorb a

bit of new information or see a bald eagle for the first time. That's exciting. It's what keeps me coming back year after year."

To read more about the upcoming Hawk Watch weekend, go to [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com).

### **IF YOU GO:**

THE 22ND ANNUAL EFFIGY MOUNDS HAWK WATCH WEEKEND will be held Friday through Sunday, September 22 - 24. Activities will be headquartered at the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center, located 3 miles north of Marquette on Hwy 76.

"Our activities will begin at 7 p.m. Friday with a family owl program followed by an outdoor Owl Prowl," said Hawk Watch coordinator, Pam Kester.

During the remainder of the Hawk Watch week-end, raptor enthusiasts will be treated to a vast array of hands on activities and live bird presentations by specialists from the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center, Houston Nature Center, and the Boone County Education Center. Raptor educators Kay Nueman and Dianne Moller will also present live bird programs.

The Effigy Mounds Hawk Watch is sponsored by the Upper Iowa Audubon Chapter and co-sponsored by the staff of Effigy Mounds and the Iowa DNR. A support staff of more than 50 volunteers aid with annual programming and coordination.

"Everything at Hawk Watch is absolutely free," says Kester. "Our goal is to have families come and enjoy the migration."

For additional information or specific program times contact the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center at 563-873-3491 or visit [www.nps.gov/efmo](http://www.nps.gov/efmo).

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## **DNR THANKS VOLUNTEER CAMPGROUND HOSTS**

OSKALOOSA — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) gave a heartfelt "thanks" to a vital group of its volunteers last week. The fourth annual Campground Host Recognition Celebration honored volunteers from across the state.

Out of the 127 campground hosts, 45 attended the Sept. 12 event at Lake Keomah State Park. DNR officials thanked the assembled volunteers for their service. Hosts received a catered lunch, certificates of appreciation and saw a presentation by Iowa company Musco Lighting about their experience helping with the Sept. 11 rescue efforts.

Campground hosts have played a key role in the success of Iowa's state parks, said DNR State Parks bureau chief, Kevin Szcodronski..

"There are a few reasons we can accomplish in our parks what we do with such limited staff," he said. "The top reason is our volunteers."

Campground hosts live and work on state park campgrounds during the busy summer camping seasons, providing visitor assistance and familiar faces to campers. Hosts greet visitors, answer questions and often help clean and maintain park facilities. Last year, Iowa's campground hosts logged more than 8,000 hours of volunteer service.

"It's something we've always wanted to do," said Regina Orgazan, who hosts at Lacey-Keosauqua with her husband Mike. "We really love nature and we thought, what a neat way to be close to the outdoors."

Of Iowa's 85 state parks and recreation areas, 54 boast campgrounds. Volunteer hosts provide services at 38 of those parks.

Joining volunteers at the event, were Iowa State Senator Tom Rielly and Natural Resource Commissioner Richard Francisco. The recognition event also included a potluck dinner, hay ride and live music on Sept. 11. Iowa State Representative Danny Carroll joined those festivities.

For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at [Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us).

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